

MEMORANDUM

(5677)

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

*Noted by HAK*SECRETINFORMATION

July 28, 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR: MR. KISSINGER

FROM: JOHN H. HOLDRIDGE *HH/a*

SUBJECT: CIA Study on Cabinet Troubles in Laos

Attached at Tab A and summarized below is the CIA study we requested on the recent cabinet troubles in Laos (which have now apparently eased). We did not immediately send forward this document because we believed that it had been overtaken by Souvanna's subsequent decision to withdraw his recent cabinet changes, thus eliminating -- in Souvanna's view -- the need for action by the National Assembly which then threatened a no confidence vote. However, later reports now indicate that Souvanna nevertheless may submit his cabinet for some form of Assembly approval but that he is fully confident of favorable action in the legislature.

The CIA study attributes Souvanna's cabinet troubles to maneuvers by his rightist rivals (the powerful Sananikone family) and their young turk allies in the new National Assembly to enforce Constitutional provisions requiring Souvanna's pro forma resignation and reinvestiture of the government by the newly elected Legislature. Souvanna refused, arguing that his government is based on the 1962 Geneva Accords and therefore is exempt from this constitutional provision. A crisis initially was averted by a compromise in which Souvanna modified his cabinet to appease his rivals, and the Assembly agreed to forego a vote of confidence. The King of Laos, however, revived the dispute when he rejected the deal and indicated a preference for some form of National Assembly action. The study concluded that events would very unlikely progress to the point of seriously threatening Souvanna's position as Prime Minister. It noted that Souvanna's hand had been strengthened considerably by strong Laotian military support expressed for him on July 21 and that in any event, Souvanna was determined to protect his government and was fully confident of beating back any rightist challenges.

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